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Holodomor: The Ukrainian Genocide

The first scholar to posit a conceptual framework for analyzing what we now call “the Holodomor” was Raphael Lemkin. A renowned authority on international law, well versed in the Soviet legal system, Lemkin called upon his vast knowledge of the political realities in the Soviet Union to give a penetrating insight into the mechanics of the Ukrainian tragedy in his essay entitled “Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine.”¹ The paper was written for the 20th anniversary of the Great Famine, commemorated by the Ukrainian community of New York in September 1953. Ten years earlier, Lemkin developed the concept of “genocide,” whose main ideas he later prevailed upon the United Nations to enshrine in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In line with these principles, Lemkin deemed the Ukrainian catastrophe to be “not simply a case of mass murder,” but “a case of genocide, of the destruction, not of individuals only but of a culture and a nation.”

Lemkin viewed the Ukrainian genocide as a four-pronged attack on the Ukrainian nation. “The first blow,” he affirmed, “is aimed at the intelligentsia, the national brain, so as to paralyze the rest of the body.” As a result, large numbers of Ukrainian “teachers, writers, artists, thinkers, political leaders, were liquidated, imprisoned or deported.” Simultaneously, the regime attacked the Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, in Lemkin’s words—the “soul” of Ukraine, liquidating its Metropolitan and clergy. “The third prong of the Soviet plan was aimed at the farmers, the large mass of independent peasants

¹ Raphael Lemkin Papers, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation, Manuscripts & Archives Division. All quotations are taken from the eight-page MS entitled “Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine.” Thanks are due to Ms. Megan O’Shea of the Manuscripts and Archives Division, NYPL, for the help in locating the document.

who are the repository of the tradition, folklore and music, the national language and literature, the national spirit of Ukraine. The weapon used against this body is perhaps the most terrible of all—starvation.” It is significant that Lemkin emphasized the peasants’ national rather than economic attributes. In fact, he rejected what has since come to be known as the “peasantist” or socio-economic interpretation of the famine. He criticized the “attempt to dismiss this highpoint of Soviet cruelty as an economic policy connected with the collectivization of the wheatlands, and the elimination of the kulaks, the independent farmers.” He insisted that “large-scale farmers in Ukraine were few,” that there was grain in government granaries, and that the much-needed crop was exported “for the creation of credit abroad.” To further buttress his argument, Lemkin quoted Stanislav Kosior, the head of the Communist Party of Ukraine, to the effect that “Ukrainian nationalism is our chief danger.”² “The fourth step in the process consisted in the fragmentation of the Ukrainian people at once by the addition to Ukraine of foreign peoples and by the dispersion of the Ukrainians throughout Eastern Europe. In this way, ethnic unity would be destroyed and nationalities mixed.”

Lemkin’s identification of the “chief steps in the systematic destruction of the Ukrainian nation in its progressive absorption within the new Soviet nation,” is consistent with the definition of “genocide” found in the UN Convention on Genocide. Article II lists five acts “committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”³ Formulated along the same lines was the accusation, inadvertently uttered before a group of collective peasants in May 1934 by a communist by the name of Prokopenko: “Starvation in Ukraine was brought about in order to reduce the number of Ukrainians, resettle in their place people from another part of the USSR, and in this way kill all thought of independence.”⁴ As a plenipotentiary of the Sakhnovshchyna *raion* executive committee (Kharkiv *oblast*), Prokopenko undoubtedly participated in the tragic

² The sentence in Kosior’s speech reads: “At the present moment, the chief danger in Ukraine comes from local Ukrainian nationalism, in cahoots with the imperialist interest;” *Izvestia*, 2 December 1933, p. 5.

³ See www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html.

⁴ *Sovetskaia derevnia glazami VChK-OGPU-NKVD*, vol. 3, bk. 2, 1932–1934, Moscow, 2005, p. 572. The “Special Report” of the Secret-Political Department of the OGPU is dated 12 May 1934.

events and well understood their significance. Lemkin's broad conceptualization of the Ukrainian genocide never got the attention it deserves, and yet it is as valid today as it was half a century ago.

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The history of the Soviet regime's hostility towards the Ukrainian ethno-national group can begin with the first invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Red Army in 1918, and the occupiers' wanton killings of Ukrainian nationals in Kyiv. During the famine of 1921–1923, which engulfed the Volga valley, Northern Caucasus and southern Ukraine, Moscow acted like a typical colonial power, extracting grain from the famished Ukrainian steppe regions to feed Russia's hungry capitals and the starving Volga regions.⁵ But it was Stalin's "revolution from above" that unleashed communist destruction in a truly genocidal fashion, culminating in the killing of millions of Ukrainians during the Great Famine. To fully understand the catastrophe of 1932–1933 it is necessary to look at the changes proposed by Stalin, at the end of the 1920s, to the Soviet economic development, its social structure, and the nationalities policy.

Having consolidated his power over the Communist Party, Stalin decided to transform his sprawling and populous but backward empire into a modern military power with a solid industrial base. When the opportunity presented itself, he would take up Lenin's mantle and continue the expansion of socialism, interrupted by the defeat of the Red Army at the gates of Warsaw. The capital needed for this project would come from Russia's traditional source, the export of grain and other natural resources. Buying grain for export from independent farmers was costly, and house-to-house requisitioning, practiced during the Civil War, proved inefficient. Collective farms would better provide the Soviet state with the necessary "marketable grain," just as the huge landowners' domains had done in tsarist times.⁶

⁵ R. Serbyn, "The Famine of 1921–1923: a Model for 1932–1933?" in: *Famine in Ukraine 1932–1933*, Toronto, 1986, pp. 147–187; R. Serbyn, "The Origin of the Ukrainian Famine of 1921–23 in the Light of Recent Research," in: *Famine-Genocide in Ukraine 1932–1933*, Toronto, 2003, pp. 165–184.

⁶ See Stalin's lecture on 28 May 1928 at Sverdlov University, *Pravda*, 2 June 1928; J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 11, Moscow, 1955, www.marx2mao.com/Stalin/Index.html.

When Stalin introduced his first Five-Year Plan in 1928, he knew that the peasants would oppose collectivization and that his “revolution from above” would inevitably turn into a “war against the peasantry.” He was aware that the main resistance would come from Ukraine and the largely Ukrainian Kuban, two of the three main grain-producing regions of the USSR, where the Russian *obshchina* tradition was largely unknown. The “wonderful Georgian,” as Lenin had called him, and the party’s authority on the nationalities question, did not ignore the rise of national consciousness among the Ukrainians, resulting from the party’s indulgent policy of indigenization. It was Ukrainization, together with the distribution of land to the poor peasants, that had placated the Ukrainian peasants, who made up over 80% of the population of the Ukrainian SSR. Depriving the peasants of their property and liberty would be especially dangerous in Ukraine and the Kuban, as the opposition to collectivization risked to unite with the growing resentment against Russian domination.

To facilitate the collectivization of the peasantry in Ukraine, Stalin proceeded to decimate the Ukrainian elites and divide the population. In the fall of 1929, the GPU arrested 700 intellectuals, accused them of belonging to the “Union for the Liberation of Ukraine” (SVU), a subversive Petliurite organization that the GPU had invented for the occasion. In March–April 1930, 45 of the accused were put on trial and charged, among other crimes, with setting up cells among the peasantry with the aim of separating Ukraine from the USSR. The purpose of this show trial (appropriately held at the Kharkiv Opera House; the accused joked: “performed by SVU—directed by GPU”) of Ukrainian political and cultural leaders (former ministers of the Ukrainian national government, academicians, professors, etc.) was to terrorize the Ukrainian intelligentsia and prevent it from siding with the peasantry during the regime’s attack on the latter’s way of life. Most of the accused were sent to the Gulag, where many later perished. That year, the GPU forced the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church to proclaim its own liquidation. Other trials of various invented organizations followed, the range of victims extending from Ukrainian patriots in academic and military establishments to disenchanted communists still in party and state service. The shared indictment was “national deviation.” The peasants, who in Stalin’s words constituted “the main army of the national movement,” were thus deprived, at a crucial moment, of

the leadership of those whom Lemkin later called the “Soul” and the “Brains” of the nation.⁷

The natural leaders in the countryside were the richer, better educated and more enterprising farmers pejoratively called kulaks (*kurkuli* in Ukrainian). They resisted collectivization the most stubbornly, because they had the most to lose. Stalin expected the poor peasants to regard the kulaks as class enemies and help the authorities confiscate their property in favor of the kolkhoz. On 27 December 1929, he announced that conditions were ripe for “the elimination of kulaks as a class.” Dispossessed, the kulaks were driven out of their homes and either given poorer land outside the kolkhoz, resettled in another part of the country, or exiled to Russia’s Far North. There were two waves of dekulakization: a main one in the early months of 1930 and a smaller one a year later. In 1934 Stanislaw Kosior, the party boss of Ukraine, reported that 200,000 households, or about one million souls, had been dekulakized in his republic. Several hundred thousand people were deported beyond the borders of Ukraine. Many thousands perished en route or at the unhealthy destinations of their exile. Dekulakization deprived Ukraine of its best farmers, the custodians of its national culture and spirit. In social terms it meant the loss of the peasants’ natural leaders in their confrontation with the repressive regime.

At the November 1929 plenum of the Central Committee, Stalin declared collectivization to be sufficiently advanced to begin the “total collectivization of entire districts.”⁸ The plenum decided to mobilize 25,000 industrial workers (including 7,500 in Ukraine) to be assigned chairmanships of large kolkhozes or given other administrative jobs. Additional cadres were periodically dispatched, and eventually the overall number almost tripled. By the spring of 1930, Ukraine had some 50,000 of these activists with special powers to organize, punish, and terrorize the peasants. In November 1929 only 522,500, or 10.4%, out of the total of 5,144,800 Ukrainian households were members of collective farms. The escalation of the plan pushed its realization to 30.7% by 1 February 1930 and to 62.8% (with 68.5% of the arable land) five weeks later. The spectacular success was achieved with

⁷ J. V. Stalin, “On the National Question in Yugoslavia,” *Works*, vol. 7, Moscow, 1954, p. 71.

⁸ R. H. McNeal (ed.), *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, vol. 4, Toronto, 1974, p. 25.

unrestrained violence and at the cost of many lives. As peasant solidarity emerged in the countryside, a reign of terror descended. Government plans were accomplished with such encouragements as "let them all die, but we will collectivize the district to 100%."⁹

From rich to poor, farmers resisted in any way they could. Some slaughtered their animals, others "self-dekulakized" and fled to industrial centers like the Donbas. The protests became more and more violent. Enforcers of dekulakization and collectivization were attacked and driven out of the villages. Women led many of the disturbances. Leaflets appeared with social, political, and national slogans. Between 20 November 1929 and 7 April 1930, 834 flyers were picked up in Ukraine with such slogans as: "Time to rise up against the Moscow yoke," "Ukraine is perishing, my Ukrainian brothers," "Petliura told us the truth—time to wake up, time to rise up."¹⁰ By 6 February 1930, the OGPU arrested 15,985 conspirators in the USSR, 5,171 of them in Ukraine. GPU reports warned of a general insurrection planned by Petliurite organizations for the summer of 1930. Some insurrections grew to thousands of people and had to be put down by military force.¹¹

In the face of a general economic meltdown and widespread social upheaval, Stalin staged a tactical retreat. On 2 March 1930, he published in *Pravda* an article entitled "Dizzy from Success," in which he blamed local cadres for the excesses and errors in the drive for collectivization and reaffirmed the principle of free membership in kolkhozes. He abandoned the harsher "commune" system and settled for the looser "artel" association. Collective farmers were allowed to keep a small plot of land, a house, and some domestic animals. These vestiges of private property, especially the cow, would be their main source of nourishment during the coming years.

⁹ V. Vasiliev, L. Viola, *Kolektyvizatsiia i selianskyi opir na Ukraini (lystopad 1929– berezen 1930)*, Vinnytsia, 1997, p. 195. A. A. Andreeva, the wife of the Russian writer Daniil Andreev, recounted how her friend's father, who had been sent to collect grain in Ukraine, begged Molotov to open the overflowing granaries because people were starving. Stalin's henchman snapped back: "I forbid it. Half will croak, half will join the kolkhoz," www.gazetamim.ru/mirror/interview/andreeva2.htm.

¹⁰ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: prychny ta naslidky*, Kyiv, 2003, pp. 421–422.

¹¹ *Sovetskaia derevnia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, bk. 1, pp. 144–145.

Encouraged by Stalin's "retreat" and the temporary disorganization of the cadres, peasants abandoned the kolkhozes, withdrawing their land, cattle, and farming implements. By September 1930 only 28.4% of households and 34.8% of arable land remained in the collective farms in Ukraine. The movement was resisted by the authorities and was not achieved without a struggle. That year the OGPU recorded 13,756 disturbances in the USSR, of which 4,098 (30%) took place in Ukraine. In 10,071 of them (3,208 in Ukraine) the OGPU counted 2.5 million participants (one million in Ukraine).¹² Spring was the most turbulent time. In March, 6,528 disturbances were recorded in the USSR and 2,945 (45%) in Ukraine. Entire districts rose up in arms and many villages were "liberated" from Bolshevik rule. Skirmishes between the rebels and the authorities left many dead and wounded on both sides. Poorly armed and without proper organization and coordination, the sporadic uprisings were eventually put down, in many cases by military force. The rebels were punished and collectivization continued. By 10 March 1931, 48.5% of Ukrainian households and 52.7% of the arable land were back in kolkhozes, and seven months later the figures rose to 68.0% and 72.0%, respectively. In the grain-producing steppe region, 87% of households were collectivized. When the first wave of famine swept Ukraine in the winter of 1931–1932, most of the peasantry was already collectivized.

Concomitantly with the "struggle for collectivization" and the move to "liquidate the kulaks as a class," the Party launched an equally vigorous "struggle for bread," which was, after all, the main short-term economic goal of Stalin's collectivization. High grain procurement quotas were established for both the socialized (collective farms) and the private (individual farms) sectors. The same people who had sent kulaks into exile and forced the peasants into kolkhozes now enforced the confiscation of the peasants' grain. In 1930, the peasants fought against enserfment, but still looked after their land, and the harvest was good. Overall grain production for the USSR was 73–77 million tons (hereafter—m.t.), with 23 m.t. for Ukraine. The state collected 22 m.t., including 7.7 m.t. from Ukraine. At the same time, Soviet grain exports rose from 30,000 tons in 1928 and 180,000 in 1929 to 5,832,000 in

¹² *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie 1927–1939 gg: Dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 2, Appendix no. 3.

1930 and 4,786,000 in 1931.¹³ Stalin's assurance that collectivized agriculture would provide more "marketable grain" was vindicated. In terms of nutritive value, one million tons of grain was sufficient to feed five million people for one year.

Stalin expected the level of grain production to expand, state procurement to increase, and the exports to grow. In 1931, however, overall grain production fell by about 15 million tons. Adverse climatic conditions were partly to blame for poor crops, but the decline was mainly due to the ferocious confrontation between the state and the agricultural producers in both the collective and private sectors. Farmers felt exploited. They had not improved their situation by joining the kolkhozes, and they wanted out. Incompetent administrators of collective farms, chosen for party loyalty rather than professional competence, mismanaged and brought the farms to ruin. Wages for *trudodni* (labor days) fell in arrears, and collective farmers lost interest in their work. Apathy and negligence reigned. The cattle was not properly cared for and perished in great numbers. Sabotage increased. Much grain was lost in the fields, during threshing and transportation. While the peasants resisted their enslavement, a new specter appeared on their horizon—starvation. They learned about the high procurement quotas and realized their predicament. In 1929 and 1930 they still had some reserves, but by 1931 these had been depleted, and the imposition of high delivery quotas would leave them with insufficient reserves for food, animal feed, and seed material for next season's sowing.

Towards the end of 1931 signs of famine appeared across Ukraine, and by the summer of 1932 hundreds of thousands died of starvation. Peasant protests changed from resisting collectivization to avoiding procurement. The peasants' flight from villages increased. In January–February 1932, 89,300 peasants left their farms in the Dnepropetrovsk oblast alone.¹⁴ Many went to Russia, where food was available. In early April the Voronezh authorities complained to their Donetsk counterparts about the influx of "whole families with children and frail old people," who had been "buying, trading, and begging for bread," and "cramming railway stations," since February. "Only in the last several days 12 individuals were buried; they had come for bread from

¹³ See Tables in: R. W. Davies, S. D. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933*, New York, 2004. pp. 448, 467, 470.

¹⁴ *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni...*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 318.

neighboring Ukrainian *raions*.”¹⁵ On 26 April Kosior informed Stalin about individual cases of starvation and “individual villages that are starving.” Afraid of irritating Moscow, the party chief of Ukraine dismissed the looming catastrophe with assurances that “all talk of famine must be categorically discarded.”¹⁶ But famine there was, and the oblasts were letting Kharkiv know about it. Three weeks later, Vinnytsia party secretary Alekseev wrote about the horrors in the villages and towns of his *oblast*: widespread starvation, poisoning from eating animal carcasses, cannibalism, high rate of famine mortality and the threat to the new harvest.¹⁷ The Ukrainian famine had become an open secret and all levels of the Soviet society knew about it.

The party leadership in Ukraine found itself in a quandary: it had to ensure production and delivery to the state while being confronted by a revolting mass of starving farm workers, unwilling and incapable of doing “honest” work under murderous conditions. On 10 June 1932, Heorhii Petrovsky, the head of the Ukrainian state, and Vlas Chubar, the head of the Ukrainian government, who had both personally inspected the Ukrainian countryside, sent separate reports to Moscow, detailing the appalling situation and pleading for one or two million poods (=16,361–32,722 t.) of grain.¹⁸ They argued that starvation had begun in December 1931, and the 3,000 tons of millet released on the CC AUCP(b)’s orders were inadequate for famine relief. Local authorities lacked resources. Peasants pestered Petrovsky: “Why did you create an artificial famine, ... why did you take away the seed material?” Theft was spreading, and kulaks and Petliurites were gaining support from the “middle” and poor peasants. Sowing was done with seeds of poor quality and in insufficient quantities, and large amounts of land were left unsown. The search for food led to an exodus to Belarus, and to the Dno station (Pskov *oblast*), the Central Black-Earth Oblast, and the North Caucasus, in Russia. Petrovsky warned that if assistance

¹⁵ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukraini: ochyma istorykiv, movoiu dokumentiv*, Kyiv, 1990, p. 108.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

¹⁷ R. Pyrih (ed.), *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini. Dokumenty i materialy*, Kyiv, 2007, pp. 342–347. This document is erroneously dated in the book at 15 October.

¹⁸ The complete letters are in: V. Vasiliev, Y. Shapoval (eds.), *Komandyry velykoho holodu: Poizdky V. Molotova i L. Kaganovycha v Ukrainu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1932–1933 rr.*, Kyiv, 2001, pp. 206–215.

was not provided, starvation would make the peasants pick unripe grain and put the harvest in jeopardy.

By alerting Stalin to the economic and political difficulties in Ukraine, the Ukrainian leaders hoped to convince the general secretary to make new concessions, like the ones in March 1930. The ensuing correspondence between Stalin and Kaganovich is revealing of the Kremlin's attitude towards the troublesome republic and Stalin's elaboration of the mechanism for the eventual famine. Stalin rejected Ukraine's plea for help and blamed local mismanagement for the fact that "*fertile* districts in Ukraine, despite the fairly good harvest [in 1931—R.S.], have found themselves in a state of *impoverishment* and *famine*."¹⁹ He further complained that "several tens of thousands of Ukrainian collective farmers are still traveling around the entire European part of the USSR and demoralizing our farms with their complaints and whining." Stalin proposed a top level conference to discuss "the organization of grain procurement and the unconditional fulfillment of the grain-procurement plan." He insisted that the first secretaries of grain-producing regions be made personally responsible for the grain delivery. On 21 June, Stalin instructed Kharkiv to carry out "at any price" the plan for grain deliveries from July to September.²⁰ "Unconditional fulfillment" and "personal responsibility" became the key watchwords in the coming procurement campaign, which ended in the genocidal famine.

The 3rd Conference of the CP(b)U, which opened on 6 July under the watchful eyes of Molotov and Kaganovich, was wholly devoted to the upcoming harvest and grain procurement. The Ukrainians were informed that their quota had been lowered to 356 million poods (hereafter m.p.), i.e. 5.8 m.t., but had to be carried out in full. Declarations from regional leaders that the farmers were starving, that much land lay fallow, and that the losses during harvesting would be higher than last year's by 100 to 200 m.p., did not bend the resolve of Moscow's envoys. They forced the conference to adopt a resolution "to

¹⁹ R. W. Davies, O. Khlevniuk, *et al.* (eds.), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931–36*, New Haven, 2003, pp. 136–139. Underlining by Stalin. This is the only known acknowledgement by Stalin of the famine in Ukraine.

²⁰ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukraini: ochyma istorykiv, movoiu dokumentiv*, Kyiv, 1990, p. 186 (doc. 64).

carry out in full and unconditionally” the proposed grain delivery plan.²¹ Harvesting began with little success, because the peasants were starving. On 6 July *Izvestia* prepared a confidential report about the famine, with excerpts from the letters it had received, mainly from Ukraine. “Why is Ukraine starving like this?” complained one reader. “Why is there no similar famine in other republics? How do you explain that there is no bread in grain-producing Ukraine, while Moscow has as much of it as you want?” One letter ended with a threat: “If war comes, we shall not defend the Soviet power.”²² Two weeks later, a secret OGPU report claimed that Ukraine held first place in the number of anti-Soviet disturbances. Another OGPU report, dated 5 August, spoke about the liquidation of eight nationalist groups in Ukraine, two of which consisted of former members of the outlawed Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP—non-Bolshevik). They had a leftist program and were conducting systematic activities among the members of the CP(b)U.²³

Probably influenced by the events in Ukraine more than by any others, Stalin began to devise a suitable mechanism to ensure that his orders on grain deliveries would be carried out. The result was the infamous “five-ears-of-corn law.” Writing on 20 July to Kaganovich and Molotov, the general secretary proposed to combat widespread theft by “dekulakized kulaks” and others with a three-part law that would: (a) make railroad freight, collective-farm property and cooperative property equal with state property; (b) make theft of any of them “punishable by a minimum of ten years’ imprisonment, and as a rule, *by death*” [emphasis added—R.S.]; (c) revoke the right of amnesty for the three criminal acts.²⁴ Socialism will not finish off capitalism, argued Stalin a few days later, “unless it declares public property (belonging to cooperatives, collective farms or the state) to be sacred and inviolable.” On 26 July he elaborated the three sections of the future decree, remarking cynically: “We must act on the basis of law (‘the peasant loves legality’), and not merely in accordance with the practice of the OGPU,

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 194. For details of the deliberations, see *Komandyry velykoho holodu...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–164.

²² *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 408. One letter writer takes apart the fallacious statements of Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb (p. 409). Excerpts from other letters are on pp. 407–414.

²³ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 421, 443.

²⁴ *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–165.

although it is clear that the OGPU's role here will not only not diminish, but, on the contrary, it will be strengthened and 'ennobled' (the agencies will operate 'on a lawful basis' rather than 'high-handedly')."²⁵ The justice system was also to be given a task of enforcing Stalin's genocidal policies. The party-state decree "On the Protection of Property of State Enterprises, Collective Farms, and Cooperatives, and on the Consolidation of Public (Socialist) Property" was issued on 7 August 1932.²⁶ It became the main legal instrument for the implementation of Stalin's condemnation of millions of farmers to slow death by starvation.

The decree on state property was applicable to the whole Soviet empire, but its primary role in connection with Ukrainian affairs was underscored in Stalin's letter to Kaganovich, sent just four days after the promulgation of the law. Stalin ordered the Central Committee to draft a "letter-directive" to "party, judiciary, and punitive organizations" explaining the decree and the methods for its implementation. He then addressed the Ukrainian problem:

The most important thing right now is Ukraine. Ukrainian affairs have hit rock bottom. Things are bad with regards to the *party*. There is talk that in two [of the five—R.S.] oblasts of Ukraine (it seems in the Kiev and Dniepropetrovsk oblasts) about 50 raion party committees have spoken out against the grain-procurement plan, deeming it unrealistic. The situation in other raion party committees is no better. ... Instead of *leading* the raions, Kosior has been *maneuvering* ... Things are *bad* with the soviets. Chubar is no leader. Things are *bad* with the GPU. Redens is not up to leading the fight against the counterrevolution in such a large and distinctive republic as Ukraine. [underlined and doubly underlined in the original—R.S.]²⁷

Then Stalin brandished the specter of Ukrainian separatism, which had haunted many a Russian imperialist before him: "If we don't undertake at once to straighten out the situation in Ukraine, we may

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

²⁶ *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 453–454. The "Instructions on the Application of the Resolution of 7 August," signed by the chairman and the prosecutor of the Supreme Court of the USSR and the vice-chairman of the OGPU, were sent to all republican and oblast authorities on 16 September 1932. In: *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 477–479.

²⁷ *Stalin i Kaganovich Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.*, Moskva, 2001, pp. 273–274.

lose Ukraine.” Stalin had only disdain for the loyalty of the CP(b)U, which was composed of 500,000 members (“ha-ha,” he snickers), but infiltrated by “agents of Pilsudski” and “quite a lot (yes, a lot!) of rotten elements, conscious and unconscious Petliurites.”²⁸ Betraying his expectation of dire consequences from his murderous property decree, Stalin warns: “The moment things get worse, these elements will waste no time in opening a front inside (and outside) the party, against the party.” There was, of course, no danger from Poland, after the signing of the non-aggression treaty (25 July 1932), and the surviving Petliurites were too weak to matter. The real threat could only come from the disillusioned Ukrainian communist cadres. An insurrection could become a reality if the expected famine (Stalin insinuated this probability in his allusion to “the moment things get worse”) could bind together the threatened middle and lower cadres of the CP(b)U with the distressed peasantry. Stalin intended to strengthen his rule in Ukraine and transform it “into a real fortress of the USSR,” otherwise, he insisted, “we may lose Ukraine.” Ukraine needed a strong hand to prevent an alliance between the CP(b)U and the peasants. Stalin thought of replacing Kosior and the GPU boss Redens. Eventually Kosior was retained but reinforced with the hardliner Pavel Postyshev, and Redens was replaced by another hardliner—Vsevolod Balitsky.

By the end of August, the stage was set for the realization of Stalin’s main imperatives regarding the Ukrainian ethno-national group: the maximum extraction of grain at whatever cost, the enslavement of the rural population, and a switch from Ukrainization to Russification. The 1932 harvest was even worse than that of the preceding year. Again, the confrontation between the state and its citizens at the time of sowing, weeding and harvesting was the main cause. Weakened by hunger and discouraged by their unsuccessful struggle, the collective farmers would not and could not work as they should. The loss of draft animals was not compensated by tractors, as they were not supplied in sufficient numbers. As the new quotas became known, they provoked the ire and protests not only from the farmers but also of local party workers and administrators, who also considered the procurement plans unrealistic. Delivery regulations obliged the kolkhozes to fulfill their obligation to the state before responding to the needs of their members. Most collective farms did not give out any “advances” (in fact, earned wages

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 274.

for *trudodni*) and their members had to rely on the paltry yields of their meager plots and milk from their cows. Some conscientious kolkhoz chairmen refused to adhere to the plan and either tore up their party cards and fled, or countered direct orders with subterfuge. The farmers, frightened by last year's horrors, tried to cheat the famine and the famine makers. They stole grain from the fields during wheat cutting, threshing, transporting and milling. Stronger and more enterprising farmers once again left their villages to seek food in urban centers or neighboring republics.

The grain procurement was not going well, and Stalin sent Molotov and Kaganovich on frequent missions to Ukraine and the North Caucasus to supervise the work and purge recalcitrant cadres. In Kharkiv on 29 October, Molotov agreed, with Stalin's acquiescence, to a reduction in the grain procurement by 70 m.p. (1.15 m.t.), but obliged the Ukrainian Politburo to collect the grain quota in full. Grain from collective farmers' private plots would be integrated into that of the kolkhoz. Then Molotov sent top Kharkiv party leaders to the villages, not to organize famine relief but to supervise grain collection and purge local cadres, who had been accused of siding with the "kulaks and Petliurites." New regulations followed: kolkhozes and private farmers found guilty of "sabotage" were "blacklisted," their village stores were closed and goods removed, while punished peasants lost the right to buy and sell on the free market. Itinerant courts and special "*troikas*" were set up to apply the 7 August property law. Redens and Kosior were given the task of drawing up an operational plan for the "liquidation of the main nests of kulak and Petliurite counterrevolutionaries."²⁹

On 20 November, after securing Stalin's approval, Molotov forced a resolution through the Ukrainian government, consisting of two sets of measures: the confiscation of grain and edibles, and the repression of all opposition.³⁰ Grain collection was to be completed by the end of the year and the storage of sowing material by 15 January 1933. Kolkhozes withholding deliveries became liable for having all their grain reserves transferred to state procurement, irrespective of the purpose for which they were constituted. These kolkhozes (in fact, the majority) were forbidden to pay out "advances" for *trudodni*, and where such "illegal distribution" had already taken place, the grain was to be taken back for

²⁹ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, op. cit., pp. 356–360, 388–397.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 399–400.

state collection. Heads of collective farms were made personally responsible for carrying out these orders. The property law of 7 August was made applicable to all thieves of kolkhoz property, including the kolkhoz administration (bookkeepers, warehouse workers, etc.). Kolkhozes that had permitted theft of kolkhoz grain were fined 15 months' worth of meat taxes, which was collected in potatoes if meat was not available. This meant that cows belonging to the kolkhoz and/or to their members would be sacrificed to pay the fine, and if that was not sufficient, potatoes and other edibles would be confiscated.

These resolutions left the collective and private farmers at the complete mercy of the repressive organs and gave local activists a free hand in resorting to unrestrained violence. All grain that could be seized was taken from the farmers, no matter how they had acquired it—whether it was earned with “work days,” raised on private plots, bought or traded, or stolen from the fields. Nor did it matter if the owners were saving it for next season's sowing or to feed their families. House searches were conducted and when activists found no grain, they took all the other edibles, leaving the families without any means of subsistence. On the basis of the 7 August law, farmers were arrested, abused, and tried for theft and sabotage. Collective farm chairmen, accountants, and other personnel were not immune to the regime's wrath; they too were arrested, shot, or exiled for “squandering” kolkhoz property. Paying out *trudodni* before fulfilling the mandatory grain delivery was a “misuse” of collective property. The chairman of Orikhiv *raion* in Dnepropetrovsk *oblast* and his associates received sentences of 5 to 10 years for just such a crime, while Kotov, a party boss of the Otradna *stanytsia* (Cossack town) in the Kuban and 15 members of his committee paid for it with their lives.³¹ In November 1932, the GPU arrested 8,881 “squanderers” of kolkhoz wealth in Ukraine. Among them were 311 heads of collective farms and 702 members of kolkhoz administrations; 2,000 of the accused were labeled as former Petliurites and Makhnovists.³² From August to November, the GPU arrested 21,197 people in connection with grain procurement, and the militia held another 12,896 people, including 339 kolkhoz chairmen and 749 members of administrations.³³

³¹ *Komandyry velykoho holodu...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 51.

³² *Rozsekrechena pamiat: Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini v dokumentakh GPU-NKVD*, Kyiv, 2007, p. 357.

³³ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 456–462.

Kaganovich's operations in the North Caucasus Territory (NCT), especially the Kuban region, proved particularly devastating. By 4 November three Cossack *stanytsias* were placed on the blacklist, and two weeks later Stalin approved Kaganovich's request to deport 2,000 families for "maliciously sabotaging the winter sowing." A GPU report of 8 November painted the Poltava *stanytsia* as a hotbed of Ukrainian counterrevolutionary activity since the early 1920s. It had 400 intellectuals of its own, who were joined by "some Petliurites, who migrated this summer from Ukraine." The spirit of the separatist and pro-Ukrainian Kuban Rada (non-Russian) was still present.³⁴ The purge of cadres was particularly destructive in the Kuban: 43% of the 25,000 party members were purged, including 358 out of 716 party secretaries. As much as 40% of the 120,000 rural party members may have been expelled.³⁵

After two years of large grain procurements, Stalin could claim that his methods were winning the "struggle for bread." On 27 November 1932, he boasted at a party meeting: "The party has succeeded in replacing the 500–600 million poods [8.2–9.8 m.t.] of marketable grain, procured during the period of individual peasant holdings by our present ability to collect 1,200–1,400 m.p. [19.6–22.9 m.t.] of grain." The state collected the larger amounts from the 1930 and 1931 harvests, but the 1932 harvest was small and the state could only get 18.5 m.t. Still, on 8 December the Politburo of the AUCP(b) approved the export of 100 m.p. (1.62 m.t.) of grain and planned to sell the same amount as it did the two previous years. Eventually exports had to be curtailed, but the USSR still managed to ship out about a million and a half tons of grain, enough to feed between six and seven million people. Stalin condemned all talk of famine. In early December he told the Kharkiv party chief Roman Terekhov to write storybooks for children rather than tell fairy tales about the famine to the party. This was the official line for everyone to follow: there was no famine, and any talk of famine was only propaganda aimed at discrediting Soviet achievements. The procurement struggle continued through December and January. After confiscating everything that was easily detectable, flying brigades of activists went looking for hidden "treasures." Official reports state that searches

³⁴ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 530.

³⁵ R. W. Davies, S. D. Wheatcroft, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

conducted in Ukraine from 1 December 1932 to 25 January 1933 uncovered 1.7 m.p. (27,800 t.) in 17,000 hiding places.³⁶

Stalin's conflict with Ukraine and the North Caucasus came to a head at a meeting of the CC AUCP(b) on 10 December 1932. After hearing reports on lagging grain deliveries by S. Kosior and B. Sheboldaev, the party bosses of Ukraine and the NCT, Stalin accused the Ukrainians of pursuing an erroneous political line, demonstrating "spinelessness" and lack of perseverance in the struggle with saboteurs. He then scathingly attacked Skrypnyk, the Ukrainian commissar of education, for conducting an anti-Bolshevik Ukrainization policy and maintaining ties with nationalist elements.³⁷ Stalin combined the "struggle for bread" with the "struggle against Ukrainian nationalism" and gave it expression in a secret decree titled "On Grain Procurement in Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the Western Oblast."³⁸ Signed on 14 December 1932, the document outlined three tasks: (a) to solve the problems of grain procurement; (b) to fight infiltration by counter-revolutionary elements; and (c) to curtail Ukrainization. The decree made the party and government heads of the three grain-producing regions personally responsible for completing grain procurement on assigned dates in January 1933. It demanded exemplary punishments of ten years in the Gulag for party leaders of Orikhiv *raion* (Dnepropetrovsk *oblast*) for "organizing the sabotage of grain procurement" and the deportation to the North of the entire Poltava *stanytsia* of the Kuban, also for sabotaging the grain delivery. Demobilized Russian Red Army soldiers would be settled on the vacated land and receive the abandoned buildings, equipment and cattle.

The document blamed Ukrainization for the difficulties in the grain delivery. Bourgeois nationalists, Petliurites, and supporters of the Kuban Rada had joined party and state institutions, set up their cells and organizations, and become directors, accountants, storekeepers, foremen in collective farms, and members of village soviets. This had allowed them to sabotage the harvesting and sowing campaigns. The party and state authorities in Ukraine and the North Caucasus were ordered to extirpate these counterrevolutionary elements and execute

³⁶ *Komandyry velykoho holodu...*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

³⁸ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 575–77; *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv na Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 475–477.

or deport them to concentration camps. Saboteurs “with party memberships in their pockets” also deserved to be shot. It was alleged that a non-Bolshevik “Ukrainization” had been imposed on nearly half of the *raions* in the Northern Caucasus, even though it was “at variance with the cultural interests of the population.” The verdict came in two parts. In Ukraine, Ukrainization would continue, but would be brought back to its original vocation of promoting the “correct Bolshevik realization of Lenin’s nationalities policy,” namely integration and assimilation. The Ukrainian authorities were instructed to “expel Petliurite and other bourgeois-nationalist elements from party and government organizations,” and “meticulously select and recruit Ukrainian Bolshevik cadres.” In reality, this was a signal for the return to a more sophisticated policy of Russification.³⁹

A worse fate awaited the Ukrainians in the North Caucasus Territory: they were subjected to a real national pogrom. By 27 December, the entire Poltava *stanytsia* was deported (2,158 families with 9,187 members)⁴⁰ and resettled on 28 January 1933 with 1,826 demobilized soldiers.⁴¹ The same fate awaited other Cossack *stanytsias*. The Ukrainian language was banned in local administration, cooperative societies and schools, as well as the printing of newspapers and magazines. On 15 December, the ban on the Ukrainian language was extended to all regions of the RSFSR. Stalin’s anti-Ukrainization decree reveals the extent to which the dictator was ready to sacrifice Ukraine on the altar of Soviet great-power ambitions. The abolition of Ukrainization was a sop to Russian nationalists, especially in ethnically mixed regions of the RSFSR. As a result of the new aggressive Russification policy towards Ukrainians in the RSFSR, the census figures for Soviet Ukrainians outside the Ukrainian SSR declined from eight million in 1926 to four million in 1937.

³⁹ The re-Russification of Ukraine attracted the attention of the Italian consulate in Kharkiv. “In government offices the Russian language is once again being used, in correspondence as well as in verbal dealings between employees.” See “Italian Diplomatic and Consular Dispatches,” in: *Report to Congress. Commission on the Ukraine Famine*, Washington, 1988, p. 446.

⁴⁰ Genrikh Yagoda’s report to Stalin of 29 December 1932 is in: *Lubianka. Stalin i VChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD. Ianvar 1922–dekabr 1936*, Moscow, 2003, p. 386.

⁴¹ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, op. cit., p. 530.

During the months following the Politburo's condemnation of Ukrainization, Ukrainians experienced some of the worst moments of their history. The litany of repressive measures is endless. On 15 December 1932, 82 *raions* were deprived of manufactured goods for not fulfilling their quotas of grain deliveries. Four days later, Stalin ordered Kaganovich and Postyshev back to Ukraine to help Kosior, Chubar, and Khataevich bring the grain collection to a successful conclusion. Kaganovich's mission to Ukraine (22–29 December) had dire consequences for the republic.⁴² Stalin's henchman accused *oblast* chiefs Terekhov and Stepansky of covering for their personnel and protecting the withholders of seed funds. After Stalin's approval, he prevailed on the CC CP(b)U to rescind previous restrictions on the transfer of seed and other kolkhoz grain reserves to state procurement.⁴³ Stalin's earlier pronouncement on the sanctity of socialist property no longer applied to that of the kolkhozes. Now nothing that the collective farms or its members possessed could be considered inviolable, and the state could despoil them at will. Before returning to Moscow, Kaganovich had the Ukrainian Politburo send letters to the *oblasts* ordering the transfer of seed material to grain procurement.

To encourage peasants to reveal the stolen grain, Kaganovich suggested that "peasants who volunteer to open their pits should be granted amnesty."⁴⁴ Stalin borrowed the idea and sent it as a cynical New Year's address to the Ukrainian people. On 1 January 1933, the CC AUCP(b) ordered the Ukrainian Central Committee and the Ukrainian government to inform the Ukrainian farmers that those who voluntarily delivered to the state "previously stolen and concealed grain" would not be punished, but those who continued to hide it would be prosecuted to the limit of the law, as envisioned by the decree on kolkhoz property of 7 August 1932.⁴⁵ The peasants found themselves in a no-win situation. If they surrendered the hidden grain, it would be confiscated and they risked starvation; if they denied having any, they would be searched and punished.

⁴² On Kaganovich's trip to Ukraine, see *Komandyry velykoho holodu...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 308–339.

⁴³ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 495, 513, 521–522.

⁴⁴ *Komandyry velykoho holodu...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 324, 328.

⁴⁵ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, p. 567.

Thus began the fateful year of 1933, the genocidal culmination of Stalin's war against the Ukrainians. Physically exhausted after several years of struggle and privation, the farmers of the Ukrainian SSR and the ethnically Ukrainian regions of the RSFSR were most vulnerable to the new onslaught of the communist regime's destructive actions. During the winter, spring, and into the summer of 1933, uncounted millions died of hunger, cold, and the maladies that accompanied them. Previous repressions were intensified. "Dekulakization" (no real kulaks were left) and deportations continued, although on a smaller scale and for mostly political reasons. Arrests, beatings, and all sorts of cruelties thrived as before, only now the victims were weaker and less capable of resistance. It is this period in particular that has filled the pages of survivors' memoirs and eyewitness reports of the foreign diplomats, journalists and other visitors who had the moral integrity to write the truth about what they saw. Heartrending descriptions of mothers killing one child to feed another, of humans hunting other humans have been amply documented and written up in scholarly and popular literature and need not be repeated here. What is more important here is to examine the regime's behavior during this period.

On 22 January 1933, Stalin sent a secret directive ordering Ukraine, Belarus, and the neighboring regions of the RSFSR to prevent the exodus of peasants from the Kuban and Ukraine to the nearby regions of Russia and Belarus.⁴⁶ The general secretary complained that a similar flight of "Socialist-Revolutionaries" and "agents of Poland," pretending to be looking for food, was not stopped the year before. He directed the party, state, and repressive organs of the NCT and Ukraine to prevent a repetition of such movement. All border crossings between Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the rest of the USSR were ordered closed to peasants. The OGPU was instructed to arrest all farmers trying to flee Ukraine and North Caucasus and, after isolating the counter-revolutionary elements, send the rest back to their villages. This directive is perhaps the best available evidence of the dictator's genocidal intent against the Ukrainian people.

⁴⁶ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 634–635. An English translation is in: T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, Ithaca, 2001, pp. 306–307. Balitsky had reported the departures of 31,693 farmers from Ukraine in December 1932 and the sale of 31,500 railway tickets for Russia in January 1933. See *Lubianka...*, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

The instructions sent the same day by Yagoda, the assistant director of the OGPU, to a dozen top Chekists in key regions, underscore the national character of this operation.⁴⁷ The document asserts that the departure of peasants was “directly organized by the remnants of the Socialist-Revolutionary and *Petliurite* counterrevolutionary organizations uncovered by the OGPU [emphasis added – R.S.]” Yagoda commanded the GPU of Ukraine, Belarus, and the NCT to act in accordance with his memorandum of the preceding day and “immediately arrest all [peasants] who were making their way from Ukraine and the NCT and submit them to thorough filtration.” Pickets were to be set up on all roads out of Ukraine and the NCT, and guards posted around railway stations. “Persistent counterrevolutionaries” were to be sent to concentration camps, and the rest returned to their places of residence. Those who refused to return to their villages were to be sent to “special kulak settlements” in Kazakhstan. The dates of the documents connected with these measures suggest that the project had been elaborated well in advance of Stalin’s order. On 23 January, the Politburo of the CC CP(b)U adopted a resolution to carry out Moscow’s orders, and Khataevich and Chubar forwarded the directive, together with additional instructions, to the regions for implementation.⁴⁸ *Oblast* authorities were told to warn farmers that they would be arrested if they left without permission. The GPU was ordered to instruct railway stations not to sell tickets to peasants with destinations beyond Ukraine, without travel papers from the *raion* executive committee or a certificate of employment from construction or industrial enterprises. On 25 January, Sheboldaev issued similar orders for the NCT, with instructions for the deployment of internal and border troops and the creation of filtration points.⁴⁹

The 22 January 1933 directive on border crossing was the culmination of a process which, as Petrovsky complained to Stalin, had begun in the spring of 1932. Yagoda’s 23 January report to Stalin mentions roadblocks and other measures that were adopted as early as November to prevent the flight of farmers from the North Caucasus. At

⁴⁷ *Sovetskaia derevnia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, bk. 2, pp. 262–263.

⁴⁸ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, p. 616.

⁴⁹ *Tragediia sovietskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 636–637. Sheboldaev added more precise details about the filtration points three days later; *ibidem*, p. 638.

the beginning of January 1933, 500 agitators and organizers of migrations were apprehended by the GPU in Ukraine.⁵⁰ The Italian vice-consul in Batumi reported on 20 January how the local authorities were forcing migrants to sell their last possessions to pay for the boat fare to Odesa and elsewhere.⁵¹ Stalin monitored the operations as they were being reported by Yagoda. On 2 February, Yagoda informed the general secretary that between 22 and 30 January the GPU had arrested 24,961 people: 18,379 from Ukraine, 6,225 from the NCT and 357 from other regions.⁵² Between 23 January and 2 February 1933, 8,257 people were rounded up in the Central Black-Earth Oblast and sent back to Ukraine. "With these decisive measures taken," states a Ukrainian report for February, "departures and the will to depart from the villages have greatly diminished." Thus, while 15,210 people left Dnepropetrovsk oblast between 15 and 23 January, only 1,255 departed between 25 and 31 January. By 14 February 18,166 people had been sent back to Ukraine from the Central Black-Earth Oblast.⁵³ A detailed table for 20 March 1933 shows 225,024 refugees detained by the OGPU, of which 196,372, or 87%, were sent back home to starve.⁵⁴

To "strengthen" the party leadership in Ukraine, on 24 January 1933 the CC AUCP(b) ordered the replacement of the first secretaries in the key grain-producing oblasts. Postyshev replaced Terekhov in Kharkiv, Khataevich relieved Stroganov in Dnepropetrovsk, and Razumov took Mairov's place in Odesa. Postyshev was also named second secretary of the CC CP(b)U, while retaining his post as secretary of the CC AUCP(b), and Khataevich became one of the secretaries of the CC CP(b)U.⁵⁵ In February Balitsky replaced Redens as head of the Ukrainian section of the GPU. With these hardliners, Moscow obtained direct and complete control over the party, state, and repressive organs

⁵⁰ *Lubianka...*, op. cit., pp. 392–393.

⁵¹ A. Graziosi, "'Lettres de Kharkov,' La famine en Ukraine et dans le Caucase du Nord à travers les rapports des diplomates italiens, 1932–1934," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* XXX, (102) 1989, p. 43.

⁵² *Sovetskaia derevnia...*, op. cit., vol. 3, bk. 2, p. 263.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 354. By 27 April the number of intercepted migrants was 258,401, of which 230,633 were sent back to their villages. *Famine in the USSR 1929–1934. New Documentary Evidence*, p. 83. DVD Moscow, 2009.

⁵⁵ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, op. cit., p. 619.

in Ukraine. By the end of January, Ukraine and the Kuban were swept clean of edibles, and peasants and the urban old and unemployed were dying by the thousands and tens of thousands. The Ukrainian nation was crushed, yet in the middle of March 1933 Kosior wrote unperturbedly to the Kremlin that "the famine still hasn't taught many *kolhospnyks* a lesson."⁵⁶ The famine continued, in fact, until 1934. On 14 February 1934 "food shortages" were being reported in 46 *raions* of Ukraine, with 166 villages starving. The most affected region was Kyiv oblast, where 305 families were starving and 15 died of hunger.⁵⁷

Contrary to a common misconception, references to the famine and the use of the term "holod" ("golod" in Russian) did not disappear from official usage, but it was limited to reports and correspondence sent up the administrative ladder and not in orders to subordinates. On 5 March 1933 Krauklis, the GPU chief of Dnepropetrovsk *oblast*, informed Balitsky that GPU inspections of 40 *raions* revealed famine in 378 villages, with 7,291 families starving; 18,705 people were swollen from hunger, and 1,814 had already died.⁵⁸ At about the same time Rozanov, the GPU head of Kyiv oblast, sent a statistical table which showed that in the 42 *raions* of Kyiv *oblast* 93,936 adults and 112,199 children were starving, and 12,801 people had died from the famine.⁵⁹ Two weeks later Balitsky instructed the *oblast* GPU chiefs to inform only the first secretary of the *oblast* Party organization about famine-related topics, and to do so only verbally. He also gave orders not to leave any material on the famine lying around the office and not to compile detailed reports for the GPU of Ukraine, but only inform him (Balitsky) by personal correspondence. The GPU chief insisted that all sources must be thoroughly checked, because "Petliurite elements will try to disinform us."⁶⁰ Thereafter, internal reporting on the famine decreased, but did not completely disappear.

The 12th Congress of the CP(b)U, held in January 1934, was an occasion for taking stock of the accomplishments of the last five years. Postyshev, the effective head of the party in Ukraine, reveled in the fact that 1933 had seen the "debacle of the nationalist deviation headed by

⁵⁶ *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 657.

⁵⁷ *Sovetskaia derevnia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, bk. 2, pp. 524–525.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 305–309.

⁵⁹ *Holod 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 712–713.

⁶⁰ *Sovetskaia derevnia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, bk. 2, pp. 351–352.

Skrypnyk." "Skrypnyk's deviation," Postyshev specified, "began to form itself into a complete system of national-opportunist view during the struggle for the liquidation of kulaks as a class." As the class struggle intensified, "nationalist elements became particularly active in 1931–1932, and with every passing day infiltrated new fields of socialist construction." The turnabout came after the resolution of 14 December 1932, condemning Ukrainization, and the criticism of the Ukrainian party by the CC AUCP(b) of 24 January 1933. After that, concluded Postyshev, "when it was said: strike the nationalist counterrevolutionary, strike the scoundrel, strike him harder, don't be afraid—and the activists, party men, young communists took up the cause in a Bolshevik fashion—then the collective farms took off the ground."⁶¹ Khataevich had expressed a similar idea in 1933: "A violent struggle is taking place between the peasants and our government, a struggle to the death. ... It took a famine to show them who the master is here. It cost millions of lives, but the collective farm system has been created and we have won the war."⁶²

At the same conference, Balitsky, the head of the GPU in Ukraine, described the "debacle of the Ukrainian counterrevolutionary underground in 1933" as a result of GPU action in two directions: (a) an attack against the grassroots anti-socialist groups in the countryside, infiltrated by kulak-Petliurite elements; and (b) a decisive assault on the centers of leadership, the "Ukrainian Military Organization," and others, "which led insurgent, spying, diversionist work, and agricultural sabotage." The GPU had also uncovered other Ukrainian nationalist parties, which Balitsky presented as an agency of "international counterrevolution, first of all, of German and Polish fascism."⁶³ Balitsky could have mentioned his own role in the attacks on Skrypnyk, which drove the commissar of education to suicide on 7 July 1933, and the part played by the GPU in purging Skrypnyk's Commissariat of 200 employees in the central office and removing all *oblast* directors and

⁶¹ P. Postyshev, "Borotba KP(b)U za zdiisnennia leninskoi natsionalnoi polityky na Ukraini," *Chervonyi shliakh*, nos. 2–3 (1934), www.archives.gov.ua/Sections/Famine/Postyshev.php.

⁶² Quoted by Shapoval in: "Holod v Ukraini ochyma inozemnykh dyplomativ," *Den*, 5 July 2008.

⁶³ V. Balitsky, "Vyshe bolshevistskuiu bditelnost i neprimerimost v borbe s klassovym vragom," www.archives.gov.ua/Selections/Famine/Batytsky.php. See also R. Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, Edmonton, 1986, p. 219.

90% of *raion* heads.”⁶⁴ Symptomatic of the intensification of the regime’s war against Ukrainian culture was the suicide in May 1933 of the writer Mykola Khvylovy. In Ukraine, the Stalin revolution came to a close in 1933–1934 in the same way it began in 1929–1930, with a two-pronged attack on the Ukrainian farmers and the Ukrainian national elites—an assault on the Ukrainian nation in general.

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Raphael Lemkin deemed the attack on Ukrainians a genocidal process of several years’ duration. It began with the decimation of the Ukrainian national elites and the annihilation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and culminated with the enforced starvation of millions of Ukrainian peasants. The destruction of the Ukrainian nation was reinforced by “the addition to Ukraine of foreign peoples.”⁶⁵ Western and Soviet documents, which can now be examined at leisure and analyzed in the light of the principles of the UN Convention on Genocide, suggest that Lemkin’s approach was essentially correct. Lemkin was right to regard the Ukrainian genocide in a wider perspective than the enforced starvation of the peasants, which is still the prevalent approach in genocide studies. It is now clear that the attack on the “Soul” and “Brain” of the Ukrainian nation, as Lemkin called the national elites, was not simply “collateral damage” in Stalin’s war against the peasants, but an integral part of the genocide—the intent to destroy the Ukrainian group as such.

Most scholars now recognize the responsibility of Stalin’s regime for the annihilation of a part of the Ukrainian peasantry. In addition to the series of public decrees (the-five-ears-of-corn law of 7 August 1932, and others) and secret directives (the closing of the borders of the Ukrainian SSR and the North Caucasus Territory, and others), there is the compelling evidence of about a million and a half tons of grain reserves that were locked in state granaries and a similar amount of the best grain that was exported to the West. The combined amount was sufficient to feed about 15 million people for a whole year. Nor did Stalin’s government ask the West for help, like Lenin did in 1921. What has

⁶⁴ Y. Shapoval, V. Zolotariov, *Vsevolod Balytsky: osoba, chas, otochennia*, Kyiv, 2002, p. 221.

⁶⁵ R. Lemkin, “Soviet Genocide in the Ukraine,” *op. cit.*

become more of an obstacle to recognition of the Ukrainian genocide is the identity of the target group.

Were the Ukrainian peasants targeted as peasants or as Ukrainians? Stanislav Kulchytsky and other Ukrainian historians claim that they were targeted both as peasants and as Ukrainians. Essentially, this is correct, but the question can be phrased in a more meaningful way. The real issue is whether the Ukrainian peasants were subjected to mass destruction as part of the Ukrainian group, which included the intelligentsia and other segments of Ukrainian society, as Raphael Lemkin saw it. There is no doubt that collectivization, dekulakization, and the grain confiscation had an economic and social base to them. But the national factor in the great destruction wreaked on Ukraine was evident throughout the whole period of Stalin's "revolution from above." Various repressive laws and regulations were promulgated only towards the Ukrainians. Russian intellectuals and peasants were not punished for nationalism, as were Ukrainian intellectuals and Kuban Cossacks. The Russian language and culture were not attacked in Russia nor proscribed in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian language was banned in Russia and subjected to Russification in Ukraine. There was no threat to the integrity of the Russo-Soviet empire from the Russians, but there was a potential danger from Ukraine. Stalin had no need to persecute Russian peasants as Russians; he had sufficient reasons to fear a resurgence of Ukrainian national feelings not only in the intelligentsia, but also in the peasantry, which he called the "national army." The genocide was thus directed against the Ukrainian civic nation in the Ukrainian SSR and the Ukrainian ethnic minority in the RSFSR.

The Polish Institute of International Affairs

**RAFAŁ LEMKIN:
A HERO OF HUMANKIND**

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